THE TEACHING OF PLATO'S *SEVENTH LETTER*

(1971 Master's Essay with 2025 Preface)

By Alan E. Johnson*

PREFACE

"The Teaching of Plato's *Seventh Letter*" was my master's essay (January 1971) in the University of Chicago's Committee on General Studies in the Humanities. The Committee was designed to encourage interdisciplinary graduate work. My two fields of concentration were philosophy and history. My academic advisers for the master's essay were Professor Warner A. Wick of the Department of Philosophy and Professor Richard G. Stern, the Chair of the Committee on General Studies in the Humanities.

The Committee gave me at the outset the requirements for the master's essay: it was not to exceed twenty-five pages and was to include some references to current events. Although I exceeded the page limitation, the Committee accepted my paper.

After I finished my course work for the AM degree, I returned home to Minnesota to complete my research and writing for the essay. I did not consult my advisers during the research and writing process. In the event, they had no substantive changes to my work. Their suggestions regarding some language changes are indicated by the few handwritten insertions in the following text. Except for those handwritten changes, the text is a reproduction of what I submitted to them in January of 1971. The reader is requested to excuse the fact that it was typed on an old-fashioned electric typewriter; this was decades before the age of personal computers. Please also keep in mind that I utilized the linguistic conventions, though not the prevailing thought, of the time in which I wrote. For example, I used the word "man" to refer to both men and women, a practice that I modified later that decade when becoming more sensitive to the need for gender-neutral language.

Consistent with the requirement that I include references to current events, the essay compared Plato to Herbert Marcuse, the philosophic father of the New Left. Although my study of Marcuse's writings delayed completion of the essay, I was not displeased with the result. In rereading it more than fifty years later, I think much of its analysis remains

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relevant today, whether applied now to the authoritarian Right or the extreme Left. From the 1960s to the present, I have never wavered from the principle that reason, not emotion, should guide political thought with regard to both ends and means.

Quotations from the Platonic letters were taken from the translation by R. G. Bury in the Loeb Classical Library edition of the letters. Bibliographic information for this and other primary and secondary sources is contained in the endnotes and selected bibliography at the end of the essay.

A table of contents, absent from the original essay, follows this preface.

When I wrote the following essay on Plato's Seventh Letter, I assumed that Plato's message was an actual communication from Plato to the intimates and comrades of Dion. I was unaware of an alternative view that all of the thirteen letters attributed to Plato were in the nature of an epistolary novel. I had thought that the Seventh Letter was a historical document, as distinguished from a literary creation.

The recent publication of Ariel Helfer's translation and interpretation of Plato's letters[1] is an important milestone in Platonic scholarship. First, his translation is excellent, with very careful notes explaining why he has chosen to translate particular words or phrases in certain ways and discussing possible alternative translations of them. He understands that ancient Greek words often have meanings that do not have exact cognates or parallels in English. Accordingly, his discussions of translation matters are invaluable. In effect, Helfer introduces us to the Greek language as written by Plato. It helps those of us who are not deeply knowledgeable about the language understand why classical Greek is often considered the most philosophical of languages.[2]

Second, Helfer makes a case for the proposition that all of the thirteen letters are authentic and are, in fact, another of Plato's literary creations. Thus, he refers to the letters as one work titled *Letters* instead of a collection of individual historical letters.

One of the attractions of reading Plato's letters has always been the thought that if those letters were, in fact, written by Plato, they can provide insight into Plato's own views, as distinguished from the views expressed by his Socrates or other characters in his dialogues. This would evidently be the case if the letters were actually historical, as

[1] *Plato's "Letters": The Political Challenges of the Philosophical Life*, trans. and ed. Ariel Helfer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023). All references to the *Letters* in this preface are to this edition. The references to individual letters cite the Stephanus pagination, as reproduced in Helfer's edition, and as preceded by the number of the individual letter.

[2] I have only one specific comment regarding Helfer's translation. At 7.340d, he translates λογίζεσθαι δυνατὸν ἐν αὐτῷ νήφοντα as "capable of calculating, as one who is sober in himself." I would translate λογίζεσθαιν as "reasoning" instead of "calculating." My problem with "calculating" is that this English word often has a narrow and pejorative meaning when used outside the context of numbers. However, a less familiar (to me) meaning is "marked . . . by prudent and deliberate analysis" (Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary Online, s.v. "calculating," definition 2a, https://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/unabridged/calculating). Understood in this way, Helfer's translation is correct.

distinguished from purely literary. But even if they are unhistorical literary inventions, one could say that the fact that Plato offered them in his own name rather than through a character justifies us in concluding that they express his own views. There is, however, one caveat. Plato's dialogues are famous for expressing different things to different people, and we must correspondingly distinguish between Plato's exoteric and esoteric teachings.[3] This is confirmed by statements in the letters themselves.[4] Such could be the case regardless of whether the letters are historical or literary.

If I understand him correctly, Helfer suggests that the distinction between historical and literary may not be absolute. Plato's *Letters* may be literary in nature but, still, reflect historical circumstances during Plato's life and perhaps even actual (or somewhat modified) letters written by him. In his introduction to the *Letters*, Helfer writes: "The literary unity thesis posits that the *Letters* is something like an epistolary novel—though an unusual one to be sure—a manner of semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical literary experiment, and, for its time, a brilliant innovation of literary form."[5] Although I am currently agnostic, pending further study, regarding the literary unity thesis, it certainly is a possibility, and Helfer has, to my knowledge, made the best possible case for it.

Whether one understands Plato's Seventh Letter as a historical document or as one chapter of an epistolary novel, that document contains important insights regarding ethical and political philosophy. In my following essay, I also point to the significant differences between Plato's and Marcuse's approaches to philosophy.

The thoughts I expressed in this 1971 paper are not always exactly the same as my current understanding more than fifty years later. Although the essential principles have not changed, I might alter some relatively minor points if I were rewriting it today. My books *Reason and Human Ethics* (2022) and *Reason and Human Government* (2026) elaborate my fully developed ethical and political philosophy.

Alan E. Johnson
May 11, 2025

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[3] See, for example, Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), chap. 2, esp. 50–62; Transcript of Leo Strauss's 1961 seminar on Plato's *Republic* at the University of Chicago, 21–22, 67, https://wslamp70.s3.amazonaws.com/leostrauss/pdf/Plato's+Republic+(1961).1.pdf; Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Dustin A. Gish, "Platonic Dialogues, Socratic Inquiries: A Symposium on *Plato's Philosophers*," *Perspectives on Political Science* 40 (2011): 179-185, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10457097.2011.611699, https://www.academia.edu/10525805/Symposium_on_Platos_Philosophers.

[4] *Letters* 2.312d–314c; 7.341b–342a, 344c-d.

[5] Helfer, introduction to *Plato's "Letters"*, 4.

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The Teaching of Plato's Seventh Letter

Master's Essay
Committee on General Studies
in the Humanities
The University of Chicago

Alan Edward Johnson
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I

> Our action is not an end in itself. We invite those who are ready to lay aside fear and economic addiction in order to join in the struggle; to confront injustice in words and deeds, to build a community worthy of men made in the image and likeness of God . . . a society in which it is easier for men to be human.[1]

This quotation is from a statement by a group of young people who recently destroyed draft records in an American city. Their deeds and their speech raise significant political and philosophical questions. Their deeds indicate that they will not accept law as a final authority and that they believe violence is not to be avoided. Their speech indicates that their action was not merely spontaneous and irrational, that it pointed to an end beyond itself, and that that end was a conception of a good society which is based on a view of man's nature. By committing themselves to a struggle against injustice, they implied that they knew what injustice was and thus that they knew what justice is. Yet the quotation does not state what they believe justice and what they believe the good society to be.

This essay will not attempt to ascertain the exact views of this particular group, nor will it directly address the political questions presently being contested in our society. Most of these questions involve concrete problems that our society is facing at this time and place. The problems are urgent and important. Many of them must be dealt with by the best knowledge we have available here and now. The fundamental political question is the question of the regime.[2] The question of the American regime[3] should not be rapidly answered lest wrong answers be rashly acted upon. If

the constitution of our society is to be changed, it must be known what that constitution is and has been, what the regime is with which we should replace it, and whether it is possible practically to effect a change to the new society. These questions point to theoretical questions of what justice is, what the best regime is, and what man is by nature. None of these questions can be answered quickly by young people in the heat of political involvement.

The present challenge to the American regime is difficult to identify because of its leaderless character; it can be analyzed as a historical phenomenon the opinions of which are spread by individuals and by writers of questionable distinction.[4] I know of only one living intellectual whose radical thought is rational, coherent, and knowledgeable enough to merit serious consideration. Herbert Marcuse's lifetime opposition to the status quo has a thoughtful basis in his understanding and interpretation of the history of philosophy and in his decision to adopt a modified Marxist position the origin of which he traces to the Platonic opposition of essence to "bad facticity!" But Marcuse is not a Platonist. Marcuse says there has been a historical development of philosophy since Plato, and the concept of essence now has a practical rather than a theoretical "position and function": "materialist theory" believes that "the transcendence leading from the facts to essence is historical."[5] Platonic dialectic is an ascent from the contradictions of opinion to theoretical truth.[6] Materialist dialectic is emphatically practical: it believes that the contradictions of the existing system should be and will be resolved historically—in the words of Marx's 11th Thesis on Feuerbach,

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, the point is, to change it." The attempt to insure the actualization of the best regime begins with Machiavelli and is characteristic of modern thought since Machiavelli. In Hegel and Marx it takes the form of a historical dialectic where the best regime will necessarily come about in history and through history. Marcuse's "materialist theory" has its basis in Marxism.[7]

Marcuse says the present material circumstances prevent man from achieving his essence: "man must be freed from real need and real misery to achieve the liberation of becoming himself."[8] In the new regime mankind would have the power to dispose

> of the goods available to it in such a way that they are distributed in accordance with the true needs of the community. Here men would themselves take on the planning and shaping of the social process of life and not leave it to the arbitrariness of competition and the blind necessity of reified economic relations. The power of the conditions of labor over life, along with the separation of the immediate producers from the means of labor, would be abolished. Instead of life being placed in the service of labor, labor would become a means of life. Instead of degrading cultural values to the rank of privilege and object of "leisure," men would really make them part of the common existence. These determinations of essence are distinguished from utopia in that theory can demonstrate the concrete roads to their realization and can adduce as evidence those attempts at realization which are already under way. Of course these insights cannot be arrived at through a contemplative attitude; in order to justify them knowledge can have recourse neither to evidence afforded by mere perception nor to a universal system of values in which they are anchored. The truth of this model of essence is preserved better in human misery and suffering and the struggle to overcome them than in the forms and concepts of pure thought. This truth is "indeterminate" and remains necessarily so as long as it is measured against the idea of unconditionally certain knowledge. For it is fulfilled only through historical action, and its concretion can thus result only post festum.[9]

The "social organization without surplus value" would foster the development of man. What is this development, this essence of

man, according to Marcuse? An Essay on Liberation suggests it is a "new sensibility," a new way of being a human being in an aesthetic regime. The "new sensibility"

> emerges in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle is waged for essentially new ways and forms of life: negation of the entire Establishment, its morality, culture; affirmation of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the Form of society itself.
>
> The aesthetic as the possible Form of a free society appears at that stage of development where the intellectual and material resources for the conquest of scarcity are available, where previously progressive repression turns into regressive suppression where the higher culture in which the aesthetic values (and the aesthetic truth) had been monopolized and segregated from the reality collapses and dissolves in desublimated, "lower," and destructive forms, where the hatred of the young bursts into laughter and song, mixing the barricade and the dance floor, love play and heroism. And the young also attack the esprit de sérieux in the socialist camp: miniskirts against the apparatchiks, rock 'n' roll against Soviet Realism. The insistence that a socialist society can and ought to be light, pretty, playful, that these qualities are essential elements of freedom, the faith in the rationality of the imagination, the demand for a new morality and culture—does this great anti-authoritarian rebellion indicate a new dimension and direction ~~and direction~~ of radical change, the appearance of new agents of radical change, and a new vision of socialism in its qualitative difference from the established societies? Is there anything in the aesthetic dimension which has an essential affinity with freedom not only in its sublimated cultural (artistic) but also in its desublimated political, existential form, so that the aesthetic can become a gesellschaftliche Produktivkraft: factor in the technique of production, horizon under which the material and intellectual needs develop?[10]

The entire program for the aesthetic regime can be found in Marcuse's writings. What is important for the purposes of this essay is that Marcuse has proposed a new regime—not a "utopia," which by definition cannot come into being in any place, but a regime which Marcuse intends to have come into existence in this country in the future. Marcuse has thought about the meaning of the good society

and the nature of man; because he believes law and justice are tools of the establishment supporting the perversions of the status quo, he does not condemn that lawlessness and violence which he believes will lead to the new form of society. Marcuse's thought deserves careful study if only because it is a threat to the American regime. This essay proposes to begin where Marcuse evidently began, with the first major writings of political philosophy. The premise of this essay is not that we can simply return to a solution of the past, but that Plato's conception of man's nature and the good society is important for us to understand today. The questions Marcuse asks are questions Plato asked. Marcuse's conclusions are not the same as Plato's conclusions. Why? Marcuse has written with an awareness of the history of philosophy since Plato; he readily admits to being more influenced by that history than by Plato. Is it possible that Marcuse and almost all of us do not have a knowledge of Plato's philosophy but only a version of it seen through spectacles shaded by modern prejudices? I am not suggesting that we can easily apply Plato's philosophy to our present difficult problems. I am maintaining that a knowledge of Plato's philosophy is necessary for serious reflection on the question of the good society and man's nature.[11]

I have chosen Plato's first letter to the associates and friends of Dion (called the Seventh Letter) for the focus of this essay.[12] Plato wrote this letter when he was about seventy-five years old (ca. 352 B.C.); it is distinguished by its complex form and its elaboration of political and philosophic principles. The form of the Seventh Letter is a difficult question, one ultimately involving both historical and literary questions.[13] When studied in detail the letter proves to

be carefully written but having no obvious reason for its length, its thoughtful interpretation of Syracuse's history, and its diversity of subjects. The manifest purpose of the letter is to explain Dion's policy to a political party struggling against the man who had been responsible for Dion's assassination and who now had political control. However, it is in his second letter to Dion's associates and friends (Eighth Letter) that Plato discusses the practical politics of the situation. The Seventh Letter is a carefully written interpretation of Syracuse's history and an elaboration of a philosophical and political teaching far beyond the immediate practical necessities. Why Plato wrote the Seventh Letter in this manner is known only to Plato. We cannot be sure we have grasped the reasons for its form nor can we be sure we have a correct analysis of what its form is. The length and scope of this essay preclude a complete analysis of the Seventh Letter's form; such an analysis would involve a detailed study of the letter as a work of art. I wish, however, to interpret the reasons why the letter is not limited to practical political advice, why it discusses questions of history and philosophy which might seem irrelevant to the current historical circumstances. I believe Plato's purposes in writing the letter were several: his several purposes correspond to the heterogeneous character of his addressees. Plato no longer had much immediate hope for Sicilian politics. For him, good politics depended on good men, and the only man in Sicily whom Plato knew to be of good character, intelligence, and education had been murdered. Plato knew it was possible that among the addressees of the letter there were men who pretended to be friends of Dion and Dion's policy,

who wanted Plato's support for political reasons, but who had political schemes utterly opposed to Dion's policy and Plato's philosophy. Therefore, Plato could not answer the letter from Dion's "associates and friends" with a short and definite statement of political support. He answered by saying that he would explain Dion's policy and its origin. This explanation is written in a manner which prevents men whose interest is merely to gain political power from using the names of Dion and Plato for their own advantage. Plato's account of Dion's policy, Plato's teaching, and Plato's historical actions is designed to correct rumors and distortions rampant in Sicily and the Greek world (330a, 352a). Men of intelligence and good character no longer would be duped by these false accounts and could distinguish the true friends of Plato and Dion in the light of Plato's account.

The first paragraph of the Seventh Letter indicates Plato's letter is to both young and old. Perhaps Plato's hope was not in the older generation but in the young who were still uncorrupted by the social and political realities of the Sicilian way of life. If anything was wrong in Sicily, it was a lack of proper education for the young. The young were educated in the Sicilian "school of experience." What the Sicilian variety of this school was will be seen shortly. Plato's account and interpretation of Syracuse's history and of his three journeys to Sicily can be thought of as an act of a teacher trying to educate the young to be good men and good citizens. Plato's history is not merely interesting; he abstracts from the kind of history that most often fascinates youngsters—exciting military battles, power struggles, and the like.

Plato's history is selective and evaluative; it is ultimately a support for his philosophic teaching.

We have shown that Plato considered his addressees to include different kinds of men: men who really were Dion's friends but who did not have a complete understanding of his policy, men who merely pretended to be Dion's friends and who had ulterior political motives, and young people who could be educated by a genuine account of the history of their country and an account of the thought, speeches, and actions of Dion and Plato. The complexity of the Seventh Letter's form can thus be understood as required by the heterogeneity of the addressees. There are parts of the Seventh Letter, however, which are intelligible only to students of philosophy and are only for their benefit. Plato's account of philosophy and the philosophical way of life are addressed to students of philosophy and potential students of philosophy. If Plato intended the Seventh Letter to be published and included with his works, the philosophic parts cause no problem: they were intended for philosophic readers no matter what their historical situation. I believe, however, that the philosophic parts and the philosophic teachings of the letter are addressed particularly to potential students of philosophy among the young in Sicily, perhaps including Dion's son Hipparinus. Plato was too old to go to Sicily to educate students in person as he educated Dion and the students of the Academy. This letter is his fourth journey to Syracuse, a journey of his intellectual, not his corporeal, being. To the men of Sicily who can resist the inclinations of the Sicilian way of life he offers, so to speak, his last will and testament. It is one of the few times Plato

speaks in his own name and one of the last times he will speak of philosophy. The Seventh Letter can be conceived as an introduction to philosophy and the philosophical life.

The above interpretation of the form of Plato's Seventh Letter points to Plato's philosophic teaching as the essential principle of the letter. What is this teaching? Plato's teaching arises from reflections on politics; we must consider these reflections before we try to comprehend Plato's teaching.

II

The Sicilian regimes of Dionysius I and Dionysius II were simple tyrannies. They did not have the immense power over the minds and lives of men as have Twentieth Century totalitarian states equipped with modern technology. The rulers were not ideological and moralistic "big brothers" determined to brainwash their subjects in a comprehensive system of ideology, government, and life patterned after a vulgarized understanding of a great thinker. The regime of Dionysius I and II was not a "Brave New World" but rather an old and somewhat cowardly world where both rulers and subjects primarily sought power, wealth, and indulgence in corporeal pleasures. Dionysius II was, according to Plato, a child in his desires, lacking sound education and good friends.[14] The arbitrary will of the tyrant was supported by an armed force strong enough to deter for a time foreign invasion and domestic subversion. No tradition of constitutional and civil law existed. The demos, by and large, did not care about politics: they were happy so long as their

desires could be satisfied[15] and this was possible either under a tyrant or a democratic leader. The similarities between tyranny and extreme democracy find historic proof in the Sicilian regimes.

When Dionysius I died, Dion ~~convinced~~ persuaded Plato to come to Syracuse to instruct Dionysius: to provide him with the education of mind and character which he lacked and to help him reform the Syracusan regime. Plato and Dion intended to make a tyrant a philosophic king and thus to realize in an actual regime Plato's distinctive teaching. This teaching was formulated by Plato prior to his Sicilian journeys. It is first mentioned in the Seventh Letter in an account of Athenian politics (paragraphs 2-4). In this account Plato discusses his original intention to enter public life. This intention was abandoned when Plato realized he could not survive in the Athenian political world. Socrates had been executed by Athens, and the city's laws, customs, and institutions were undergoing rapid corruption. The political and social decay of Athens resulted in a paucity of "courageous friends and trusty companions" who could help Plato reform the prevailing trends and, if necessary, reform completely the whole Athenian regime.

> . . . finally, looking at all the States which now exist, I perceived that one and all they are badly governed; for the state of their laws is such as to be almost incurable without some marvellous overhauling and good-luck to boot. So in my praise of the right philosophy I was compelled to declare that by it one is enabled to discern all forms of justice both political and individual. Wherefore the classes of mankind (I said) will have no cessation from evils until either the class of those who are right and true philosophers attains political supremacy, or else the class of those who hold power in the States becomes, by some dispensation of Heaven, really philosophic. [326a-b]

The rule of a philosopher-king is the teaching of the Republic (473d,499b,501e,503b). The division of justice into individual and political corresponds to the teaching of Socrates in the Republic that the soul of a man and the "soul" of a city participate in the form of justice insofar as they are in a natural order: by nature, the rational part, aided by the spirited part, rules the desiring part. If each part of the soul or regime "minds its own business," the man or the regime is just; if the appetitive part of the soul or regime refuses to be ruled by the rational part and takes control, injustice prevails. Although a thorough analysis of the Republic is beyond the scope of this essay, we will find a confirmation and elaboration of the Republic's teaching in the Seventh Letter. The essential identity of the teachings of the two writings proves or suggests the same authorship.[16]

Plato discusses principles of counsel in the Seventh Letter (330b-331d). He first discusses counsel to an individual about the individual's life and compares it to a doctor advising a sick man. If the individual refuses to change a way of life that is harmful to his soul or body, the counsellor should not continue to advise him. What is true of an individual's way of life is also true of a polity's way of life. If the regime is corrupt and will listen only to advice which conduces to injustice, then the counsellor should not continue to advise it.[17]

Plato's analysis of the Sicilian regime is in accord with these principles of counsel and the teachings of the Republic. Wisdom for an individual man was impossible when he partook of the Sicilian way of life.[15] That way of life was characterized by an

emphasis on and rule of the desiring part of the soul. Neither the Sicilian regime nor the men who belonged to it were just. Dion tried to separate his life from the way of life of the regime at large, but the result was that both the rulers and the subjects hated him. Plato and Dion knew the only solution was to have a philosophic ruler, but Plato, remembering his Athenian experiences, was pessimistic about the possibilities of success. When Plato tried to teach Dionysius II, the latter was advised by men who hated Dion that Dion and Plato were plotting to take over the polity while Dionysius studied philosophy. Dionysius distrusted and feared Plato and Dion; he refused to accept their plan to educate him and to reform his way of life and that of the polity at large. Under these circumstances Plato realized that his presence in the citadel would merely help to support an unjust regime.

In the Seventh Letter Plato stresses the importance of a philosophic ruler. A leader who is just, courageous, temperate, and philosophic will be an example to his people and will rule with wisdom as contrasted with "that ignorance which is the root whence all evils for all men spring and which will bear hereafter the most bitter fruit for those who have planted it." (336b.) Dionysius II's deficient intellectual and moral education made him susceptible to the political advisers who hated Dion and Plato and to the various sophists who surrounded him.[18] Dionysius II was not simply diabolical; his life is tragic, both in his personal failures and in the political and social consequences of his personal failures. The scholar Gilbert Ryle has made much of Plutarch's report that Dion at one time wrote a letter to the Carthaginians, the historic enemies of

Syracuse, promising to help their cause at the court of Dionysius II.[19] According to Plutarch, when the political advisers brought the letter to Dionysius, he expelled Dion from Sicily. Plato does not mention the letter in his account of Dion's expulsion. The report can be questioned on two counts. First, Plutarch had no way of knowing for certain that such a letter was ever a disputed subject at the court of Dionysius. Second, if such a letter did exist and was the cause of Dion's expulsion, how can one be certain, as Ryle is, that the letter was written by Dion and not by his many enemies, who were surely clever enough to forge such a document? If the latter is the case, however, we can see further that Dionysius II may have been a very confused man who could not distinguish true friends from false friends—who in the end gathered his false friends at his side and persecuted his true friends.

Dionysius' persecution of Plato, Dion, and Dion's family and property, on the one hand, and his continued determination to rule the country in the manner of a tyrant, on the other, resulted in Dion's decision to try to defeat Dionysius by force. Dion succeeded in this effort but was assassinated before he could carry out his policy. This is the ultimate tragedy of Syracuse and Sicily. Dion had studied philosophy and politics for a lifetime; he possessed intellectual and moral qualities which no previous ruler, perhaps no ruler in history, possessed. Yet the people hated his excellence; he intended to change their customary habits of indulgence and they considered this too severe. Perhaps this shows that in practice the conjunction of philosophy and power is an impossibility. The

distance between the philosopher and ordinary people is too great: neither can fully understand and accept the other. However this may be, it was certainly true in Sicily, where the people had for a long time only a history of repression on the one hand and indulgence on the other. The Sicilian people were not prepared for Dion's regime.

What were the particulars of Dion's policy? Plato says (335e-336a) Dion would first have freed the Syracusans from the yoke of tyranny. Dion and Plato believed that the arbitrary will of an irrational man should not determine the fate of a polity. Although Dion could have perhaps ruled both absolutely and justly, he chose to establish a regime of laws, which would bring order to a disorderly society. Dion also planned to drive the barbarians out of Sicily and to resettle the cities which for so long had lain waste after the actions of Dionysius I. Before Dion could put into effect his policy, however, he was murdered.

The Seventh Letter agrees with the Republic that the regime ruled by a philosopher-king is best. But Dionysius II's rejection of instruction and the assassination of Dion made the rule of Syracuse by a philosophic man impossible. Plato was now confronted with the task of advising Dion's associates and friends, men who did not know Dion's complete policy and Plato's philosophy.[20] Plato counsels them to carry out the particulars of Dion's policy: to free Syracuse from tyranny, establish just laws, and repeople all of Sicily.

> But if any amongst you is unable to live in the Dorian fashion of his forefathers and follows after the Sicilian way of life and that of Dion's murderers, him you should neither call to your aid nor imagine that he could ever perform a loyal or sound action; but all others you should call to aid you in

> repeopling all Sicily and giving it equal laws, calling them both from Sicily itself and from the whole of the Peloponnese, not fearing even Athens itself; for there too there are those who surpass all men in virtue, and who detest the enormities of men who slay their hosts. /336c-d/

In the faction-ridden Syracuse after Dion's death, equal laws were emphatically necessary: "if the victors prove themselves subservient to the laws more than the vanquished, then all things will abound in safety and happiness, and all evils will be avoided; but should it prove otherwise, neither I nor anyone else should be called in to take part in helping the man who refuses to obey our present injunctions." (337d.) Plato says the new regime should be ruled by a council of perhaps fifty men of Greek origin who are old, possess ample property, have wives and children at home, and have "forefathers as numerous and good as possible." This regime is second-best, but under the circumstances it is the only good regime possible.

Both the first and second best regimes discussed in the Seventh Letter oppose tyranny and provide for the establishment of laws and the resettlement of the Sicilian cities. The essential difference between the two regimes is the man or group of men who rule. The rulers in the second best regime are the solid citizens, the men of property, good birth, and age. The ruler in the first best regime is a philosopher. What is a philosopher? In the Seventh Letter and in the Republic Plato discusses what a man is who has a philosophic nature. The Seventh Letter says the really philosophic student is distinguished by a devotion to studying the subjects necessary for philosophy. Plato's discussion of the question (340a-345d) is in the context of an account of his third journey to

Sicily, a journey whose purpose was an intention to convert Dionysius II to philosophy.

> And when I arrived, I deemed that I ought first of all to gain proof of this point--whether Dionysius was really inflamed by philosophy, as it were by fire, or all this persistent account which had come to Athens was empty rumour. Now there is a method of testing such matters which is not ignoble but really suitable in the case of tyrants, and especially such as are crammed with borrowed doctrines; and this was certainly what had happened to Dionysius, as I perceived as soon as I arrived. To such persons one must point out what the subject is as a whole, and what its character, and how many preliminary subjects it entails and how much labour. For on hearing this, if the pupil be truly philosophic, in sympathy with the subject and worthy of it, because divinely gifted, he believes that he has been shown a marvellous pathway and that he must brace himself at once to follow it, and that life will not be worth living if he does otherwise. After this he braces both himself and him who is guiding him on the path, nor does he desist until either he has reached the goal of all his studies, or else has gained such power as to be capable of directing his own steps without the aid of an instructor. It is thus, and in this mind, that such a student lives, occupied indeed in whatever occupations he may find himself, but always beyond all else cleaving fast to philosophy and to that mode of daily life which will best make him apt to learn and of retentive mind and able to reason with himself soberly; but the mode of life which is opposite to this he continually abhors. Those, on the other hand, who are in reality not philosophic, but superficially tinged by opinions,--like men whose bodies are sunburnt on the surface--when they see how many studies are required and how great labour, and how the orderly mode of daily life is that which befits the subject, they deem it difficult or impossible for themselves, and thus they become in fact incapable of pursuing it; while some of them persuade themselves that they have been sufficiently instructed in the whole subject and no longer require any further effort. [340b-41a]

Dionysius II did not have a philosophic nature. He believed he was already sufficiently informed from other teachers, and Plato heard that Dionysius wrote a treatise later on about the subjects in which Plato then briefly instructed him.

> I know indeed that certain others have written about these same subjects; but what manner of men they are not even themselves know. But thus much I can certainly declare concerning all these writers, or ~~per~~spective writers, who claim to know the subjects which I seriously study, whether as hearers of mine or of other

> teachers, or from their own discoveries; it is impossible, in my judgment at least, that these men should understand anything about this subject. There does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith. For it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth on the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself. Notwithstanding, of thus much I am certain, that the best statement of these doctrines in writing or in speech would be my own statement; and, further, that if they should be badly stated in writing, it is I who would be the person most deeply pained. And if I thought that these subjects ought to be fully stated in writing or in speech to the public, what nobler action could I have performed in my life than that of writing what is of great benefit to mankind and bringing forth to the light for all men the nature of reality? But were I to undertake this task it would not, as I think, prove a good thing for men, save for some few who are able to discover the truth themselves with but little instruction; for as to the rest, some it would most unseasonably fill with a mistaken contempt, and others with an overweening and empty aspiration, as though they had learnt some sublime mysteries. [341b-e]

This passage is a reference for discussion on the question whether Plato wrote down his philosophy.[21] The Seventh Letter does not say that all written works are worthless--this would imply that Plato's dialogues are worthless--but that the "subjects which I seriously study" (peri ōn egō spoudazō) cannot be expressed in language. What are the "serious" subjects? Plato refers to "the nature of reality" (tēn phusin) and "the highest and first truths of nature" (peri phuseōs akrōn kai prōtōn). He says the study of every natural being includes the study of its name (onoma), its definition (logos), its image (eidōlon), knowledge (epistēme) concerning it, and finally the nature of the thing itself (autos). Knowledge is acquired through a consideration of the name, definition, and image. The name and definition are expressed in words; the image is a corporeal body; knowledge, intelligence (nous), and true opinion (alethēs doxa) exist in souls and are closest to the

object itself. The thing itself is beyond verbal expression and corporeality. It corresponds to the Platonic conception of "Form" in which the many sensible things participate (Republic 475e-480a, 507b-c; Phaedo 78d-79e; Cf. Parmenides 129a-135d). The Seventh Letter's account uses the circle as an example. Its names are "circle," "round," "sphere." Its definition is "that which is everywhere equidistant from the extremities to the centre." The corporeal image of a circle is a drawing of a circle or a corporeal sphere: the drawing and the corporeal object are subject to coming-to-be and passing-away in the course of time. Knowledge about the circle exists in souls. The nature of the circle itself does not suffer the affections of its corporeal image and is beyond the verbal expressions of name and definition. Plato says

> The same is true alike of the straight and of the spherical form, and of color, and of the good and the fair and the just, and of all bodies whether manufactured or naturally produced (such as fire, water, and all such substances), and of all living creatures, and of all moral actions or passions in souls. For unless a man somehow or other grasps the four of these, he will never perfectly acquire knowledge of the fifth. Moreover, these four attempt to express the quality of each object no less than its real essence, owing to the weakness inherent in language; and for this reason, no man of intelligence will ever venture to commit to it the concepts of his reason, especially when it is unalterable—as is the case with what is formulated in writing. [342d-343a]

Plato is not saying that his writings are worthless. He is indicating that they do not simply present the essential truths of nature. Perhaps his writings, correctly understood and interpreted, convey knowledge and true opinion pointing to the essential truths.

The second best regime of the Seventh Letter is a regime ruled by men who were not educated in philosophy. These men are selected from the rest, however, because their souls will be relatively

more ordered: men of age, property, and family are men of personal security and thus of political responsibility. No economic or psychological needs will dominate these men's souls in a way that is deleterious to the polity. Their personal stability will insure political stability. The order in their souls is perhaps the closest non-philosophic approximation to the order in the soul of a philosopher. The difference is this: the men of age, property, and family will not have the wisdom and knowledge of the philosophic man. Thus their rule is more susceptible to error; their incomplete wisdom and knowledge could cause unintended harm to the polity.

The account of philosophy and the philosopher in the Seventh Letter is not essentially different from the account in the Republic (475b-541b). In the Republic, as in the Seventh Letter, the length of training, the complexity of studies, and the philosophic way of life are emphasized. The philosopher will love knowledge of the things themselves as contrasted with the multitude who love the many sensible things of opinion. In the best regime a select group of guardians will spend their lives in education, gymnastic, and politics. At age fifty, a few will be chosen to devote their remaining years to the study of the idea of good. The rulers of the regime and the educators of the guardians will come from these men. The highest study is the study of the idea of good. The Republic does not give a complete account of the idea of good but rather an account of what the good is like (506e-507a, 509c). This is in keeping with the statement in the Seventh Letter that Plato did not write a complete account of the highest and first truths of nature and metaphysics. The Republic says the idea of good is

the cause of knowledge and truth; being (ousia) and existence (einai) are consequences of the idea of good, which is beyond being (509b). The idea of good in the Republic thus appears to be a synonym for the first principles of nature and metaphysics.

What is the relationship between the best regime of the Republic and the best regime of the Seventh Letter? The best regime of the Seventh Letter is a regime ruled by a student of philosophy who leads a rational and moderate way of life himself and who tries to bring about a rational and moderate way of life in the regime by his own wisdom, by just laws, and by sufficient attention to the needs of the polity (e.g. the necessity for re-settling the Sicilian cities). The rule of this man would be neither tyrannical nor anarchic; the end of the regime is a people who are both free and rational, courageous, moderate, and just.

The Seventh Letter is concerned with a particular polity which has a history. It cannot ignore that history because the ways of the ancestors have conditioned the populace to certain ways of life and thought. Therefore, Dion and Plato chose the best part of the Syracusan tradition, the tradition stemming from the original settlers, and intended to extirpate the Sicilian tradition with its indulgences and stupidities. Those who follow the Sicilian way of life are not to be considered trustworthy in the building of a just regime. Plato is not here simply identifying the good with the ancestral. He is choosing the part of the tradition which is conducive to a just and good regime and rejecting the part which can only lead to political and personal evil.

The Republic differs from the regime in the Seventh Letter because it has no history, no traditions. It is a theoretical construction with the premise that the habits, practices, and thoughts of the past can be disregarded by the device of expelling everyone over ten years and educating the children in the thought and institutions of the new regime (501a,540e-541a). Thus the construction in speech in the Republic can be purely theoretical: it considers man before he has been conditioned by a society in history. Rousseau was to complain that a historical development of society--in particular the modern development--resulted in the stifling and perverting of humanity. This thought is also present in the writings of Marx and his followers and Freud and his followers. Plato's Republic indicates that there is a conflict between almost every historical society and the development of man's true nature (491d-497a). The Republic's conception of man's nature is different from the conceptions of Rousseau, Marx, and Freud. Plato's conception of man does not share the romanticism of Rousseau and the emphasis on sexuality of Freud. And, in contrast to Marx, the best regime in the Republic is based on a strict division of labor and not a universal dabbling by all men in many different arts and sciences. In contrast to the doctrine of historical progress, the best regime for Plato cannot ever come into being in history or can only come into being in a very rare circumstance. The Republic is a regime in speech, a regime which tries to reflect theoretical truths. Its institutions of communism of women, children, and property and its differentiation of society into three classes with specific characteristics and duties are the result of theoretical reflections which are beyond the scope of this essay to investigate. A complete study

of the Republic would ask fundamental questions about its theoretical principles; it would ask the crucial question, "is this regime really best by nature?" Only a philosopher can consider this question. Our more modest task is to clarify and interpret the teachings of the Republic and the Seventh Letter, to ask how they are related, and to try to understand the relevance of these teachings to our own time.

The Republic explicitly identifies its best regime as existing in speech as distinguished from deed (473a-b):

> "Can anything be done as it is said? Or is it the nature of acting to attain to less truth than speaking, even if someone doesn't think so? Do you agree that it's so or not?"
> "I do agree," he said.
> "Then don't compel me necessarily to present it as coming into being in every way in deed as we described it in speech. But if we are able to find that a city could be governed in a way most approximating what has been said, say that we've found the possibility of these things coming into being on which you insist. Or won't you be content if it turns out this way? I, for my part, would be content."
> "I would, too," he said.

The Republic and the Seventh Letter are one in their insistence that the best regime is a regime ruled by a philosopher; their separate accounts of what a philosopher is and what philosophy is complement and strengthen each other. The Republic recognizes, however, that the best regime in all its details could only be realized if all men over ten years were expelled from the city; the only exception would be philosophic teachers who would educate the young in the principles and institutions of the new regime. For all practical purposes these conditions are impossible to meet. The adults would not willingly leave their children to the philosophic teachers, and a group of teachers who were truly philosophic

and not merely brainwashed would be extremely difficult to come by.[22] Thus the Republic and the Seventh Letter have the same principles. The Republic constructs a best regime in speech which can only exist in deed in the best of circumstances. The Seventh Letter's regime exists only in speech because it was not successful in deed. The Seventh Letter's speech about the best regime takes into consideration the historical setting of a particular city and is concerned about particular individuals. However, the Seventh Letter is not like most political writings, for its reflections on philosophy and politics transcend its historical circumstances. Therefore, its consideration of the just man and the just city is based on theoretical reflection on the one hand and consideration of historical particulars on the other. This does not imply that it lowers the standards in order to achieve actualization in the manner of Machiavelli. On the contrary, the Seventh Letter's high standards for statesmanship, the good regime, and philosophy are probably beyond the reach of ordinary politics. Plato knew a lowering of standards would merely result in his voice being added to the babble of political stupidity already rampant in Sicily. Why should he want to guarantee the success of a regime not worth guaranteeing? The refusal of Plato and Dion to succumb to the popular currents of the day while proposing a regime for Syracuse which was both just and possible proves their unshakeable devotion to philosophy. Their acts of courage were not merely courageous, their acts of idealism not merely "idealistic." Their courage and "idealism" was the consequence of rationality, wisdom, knowledge; it was not the consequence of a spiritedness or desire emancipated from philosophy.

> The dispute is not now of what is absolutely best if all were new, but of what is perfectly just as things now stand: It is not the Parliaments work to set up an Utopian Commonwealth, or to force the people to practise abstractions, but to make them as happy as the present frame will bear. That wise Lawgiver of old, acknowledged that he had not given his people the Laws that were absolutely best, but the best they were able to receive. The perfect return of health after sickness, is to be left to nature and time; he that will purge his body, till there remain nothing peccant, will sooner expell his life, then the cause of his sicknesse. And he that out of a desire to repaire his house, shall move all the foundations, will sooner be buried in the ruines of the old, then live to see the erection of a new structure.
>
> "A Declaration of Some Proceedings of Lt. Col. John Lilburn"[23]

Two questions confront those who would radically change a historically existing regime: (1) the theoretical truth of their conception of man's nature and of the best regime based on this conception and (2) the historical possibility of actualizing the best regime or an approximation of the best regime. The quotation from "A Declaration of Some Proceedings of Lt. Col. John Lilburn" considers the second of these questions. If we accept the theoretical principles of a political philosophy, what political actions should we undertake? Let us assume for a moment that the present-day "radical" view of man's nature and the good society is true. What are the means by which the new society is to come about in history? Is it possible that the American tradition is so rooted in our collective consciousness that to attempt to change it fundamentally would only lead to chaos, to anarchy, to barbarism? Plato did not believe that revolution was an acceptable means to the good polity (Seventh Letter 331d), perhaps because he believed that even authoritarian order was better than barbarian chaos. He realized there is a difference between what is true and good in theory and what can come into being in deed. The regime he constructed in

speech in the Seventh Letter was a good regime, the same in principle if not in detail as the best regime of the Republic. His formulation of this regime took into account the particulars of Syracuse's history and politics. Yet neither this regime nor the second best regime designed for Dion's associates and friends succeeded in deed. Plato knew there is no easy marriage of philosophy and politics; in most historical circumstances the student of philosophy is not obligated to undertake political or revolutionary activity (Republic 496a-497b, 521a-b).

The second question concerns only the empirical question of historical possibility. The first question, the question of theoretical truth, is so often taken for granted today that political discussions are largely about means rather than about the ends of political action. Marcuse has a distinct conception of human nature and the good society, a conception which seems to be shared, more or less, by the young radicals and hippies in general. Marcuse supports a regime the end and principle of which is not philosophy, not virtue, not nobility, not any of the principles and ends of the regimes described in Book VIII of Plato's Republic. Marcuse's best regime is aesthetic, and it is composed of men with a "new sensibility." A complete analysis and critique of Marcuse's view of man's nature and the best regime will not be accomplished in this essay because this writer does not have a comprehensive knowledge of Marcuse's writings. Suffice it to say, however, that Marcuse appears to place primary emphasis on the passions and opposes the passions and their imaginations to "repressive reason." He is a student of Freud, Marx, and, I suspect, Rousseau. Insofar

as he emphasizes the desiring part of the soul, he opposes Plato's conception of the good regime and man's nature. For Plato, pleasure emancipated from the rational faculty is against nature (Gorgias, Phaedrus 250e-51a, Seventh Letter 335b-c, Republic 402d-403c). Man's nature is fulfilled in his rationality as distinguished from his spiritedness and his desires; the philosopher and statesman are to be distinguished by their wisdom, rationality, knowledge and not by their ability to excite the passions of a people. We are seeing today what Plato saw in his time: cults of Dionysiac frenzy, desperate men utterly at the mercy of their animal passions leading masses of people by means of barbaric music and dance, screaming young demagogues whose irrationality, ignorance, and passion attract a generation which is fundamentally anti-intellectual. Marcuse may be admired as a thoughtful and sensitive man with insights into the failures of the American way of life. But insofar as he encourages, intentionally or unintentionally, the barbarian elements in our society, his speech and deeds can be characterized as dangerous. We do not need more pied pipers of passion leading the young into an illusory promised land. We need men who themselves have ordered souls, who have rationality, wisdom, and knowledge, who are willing to resist both the mistakes of the past and the stupidities of the present, who can choose the parts of the American tradition and even the parts of the New Left worth keeping and who have the courage to fight against powers of ignorance and passion no matter in which segment of society they may lie. We need men who can distinguish between good and seeming good, rationality and scientism, wisdom and shrewdness (Republic 428d-29a,519a), knowledge and the conclusions of

passion, courage and boldness, nobility and pretence, rhetoric and demagoguery, art and laziness, love and perversion. To use the passions of men as a means of societal preservation has been a trick of modernity. The question is whether we can continue with these means.

There are questions concerning the Seventh Letter and Plato's philosophy which this essay has not had space to consider. It has chosen to concentrate on the teachings of the Seventh Letter and the Republic and the relevance of these teachings to our time. It has tried to indicate the essential identity of the teachings of the Seventh Letter and the Republic despite manifest differences between the two writings. By "teachings" we do not mean "doctrines" or "dogmas" as these terms are understood today. A teaching is a result of philosophic study and as such claims to be knowledge or at least true opinion. The origin of the English word "dogma" is the Greek word dogma which means "opinion." We use the words "dogma" and "doctrine" to mean both true and false opinion. A "teaching" in this essay means the conclusions, if tentative conclusions, of philosophic study.[24] A "teaching" is not dogmatic, because a philosopher will never mistake his teaching, his approximation to the truth, the knowledge of truth in his soul, for the truth itself. This is why, I think, Plato puts the teachings of the Republic in the mouth of the fictional Socrates. This formal device enables Plato to state a teaching without committing himself to it. Plato realized the value of the Republic's teaching and yet, being a philosopher, perhaps knew defects in the teaching which are beyond the ken of most of his readers. The philosophic question concerning

the Republic is whether it is really the best regime and whether its conception of man is by nature true. Plato might not have been certain that the teaching of the Republic was the complete and absolute truth, although he valued the Republic's teaching as extremely close to the truth. Accordingly, Plato's genuine doubts, the doubts of a philosopher, forced him to present the teaching through a character rather than in a treatise under his own name.

Why, then, did Plato speak in his own name in the Seventh Letter? The simple answer is that Plato could not have done otherwise under the circumstances. A letter was the only form Plato could use in replying to the letter of the friends and associates of Dion. At the time it was imperative that Plato's teaching and Dion's policy be clearly identified as such because many false rumors had spread throughout Greece and Sicily about Plato's relationship with Dionysius II and about the teaching and policy of Plato and Dion. Because the outside world did not know that Plato was the opposite of a flatterer of Dionysius during his stay in the citadel, it seemed that Plato and Dionysius were the best of friends, an illusion which Dionysius had a political interest in maintaining. Plato decided it was necessary to provide a genuine account of his historical actions and to clarify his teaching and Dion's policy lest men should use the names of Plato and Dion to support actions and policies which Plato did not approve.

APPENDIX

A History of Syracuse

Sources: Plato, Epistles (Loeb edition); Plutarch, Life of Dion (Loeb edition); J. Harward, "Introduction," The Platonic Epistles (Cambridge: University Press, 1932); David Grene, Greek Political Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

Syracuse and other cities in Sicily and southern Italy were originally colonies of Greek city-states. Syracuse was colonized by some of the best Dorian families of Corinth; the tradition originating from these families was nobler than the way of life of Sicily at large. Sicily became very wealthy as a result of her fertility and natural resources. Her wealth had the consequence of a way of life among the Sicilians that was far more luxurious and excessive than the way of life of the cities in Greece. The despots of Syracuse and Akrages were particularly wealthy and they did not hesitate to display their wealth. The Carthaginians invaded Sicily during the same year Xerxes invaded Greece. They were decisively defeated by Gelon, the despot of Syracuse, in 480 B.C., and the Carthaginians did not advance again from their settlements in western Sicily for more than seventy years. Pythagoras, Parmenides, Zeno, Empedokles, Philolaus, and Archimedes lived in Italy and Sicily, and the Syracusan despot Hieron was visited by Pindar, Simonides, Bacchylides, and Aeschylus.

About 465 B.C. a revolt by the Syracusans established popular government, and popular government was soon established thoughout Sicily. In 409 B.C. the Carthaginians invaded once again and took the Sicilian cities of Selinous, Himera, and three years later Akragas. A Syracusan of humble origin named Dionysius gathered

wealthy supporters; among them was Philistos, a life-time supporter and historian of Dionysius and his reign, and Hipparinos, the father of Dion. This group of men became convinced that only absolute power and armed force could secure stable government. At the prodding of Dionysius and his supporters, the Assembly made him sole General with Full Powers (autokratēr stratēgos). After securing a bodyguard of 1000 mercenaries, he seized the citadel and became the open autocrat of Syracuse (ca. 405 B.C.). Dionysius soon made a treaty with the Carthaginians which allowed the latter to retain possession of the whole south coast of Sicily, provided independence for the Greek cities in eastern Sicily, and left Syracuse to Dionysius.

The treaty with the barbarians permitted Dionysius to consolidate his rule at Syracuse. He constructed strong fortifications to defend his private castle against internal enemies and built walls around the city to protect against foreign enemies. He gathered a powerful army and navy and had perhaps 10,000 mercenaries. Dionysius was determined to make his rule hereditary. He married two women on the same day: Aristomachē, the daughter of Hipparinos and sister of Dion, and Doris, the daughter of a leading citizen of Lokroi in southern Italy. Dionysius II was the son of Dionysius and Doris.

During his reign, Dionysius I fought wars against Carthage and recovered what the Carthaginians had taken in 409 and 406 B.C. Harward states the results of his researches as to the fate of the Sicilian cities after their "liberation" by Dionysius:

> But, while [Dionysius] thus recovered lost ground, he left it doubtful whether the Sicilian Greeks would not have been better off as subjects of Carthage than under his rule. Plato says (332c) that he gathered the whole of Sicily into a single city. This is a mild description of his policy. Before the end of his reign he had either sold into slavery or transferred to Syracuse the population of all the other cities of eastern Sicily. Naxos was destroyed and its inhabitants sold into slavery. The same fate befell the citizens of Katana. Those of Leontinoi were more mercifully treated and transferred to Syracuse. These two cities were utilised for settlements of Campanian mercenaries. Messana received new settlers from southern Italy, and her own citizens were left to wander homeless. The abandoned sites of Akragas, Gela and Kamarina were within his sphere of territory, but no attempt was made to resettle them. Bands of homeless refugees from these places and from Syracuse itself were wandering about the interior, finding shelter were they could, or living by plunder. These facts are sufficient commentary on the passages in the Epistles (315d2, 332e3, 336a6, 337a,b), in which proposals for the resettlement of the cities of Sicily are spoken of as the first step to be looked for from a reformed government at Syracuse.[25]

Dionysius soon controlled southwest Italy, permitting only Lokroi to retain freedom. In southeast Italy a confederacy of the Greek colonies was led by the city of Taras. The philosopher Archytas counseled the confederacy and was chief magistrate of Taras seven times. Dionysius did not try to subject this confederacy to his direct control.

Plato begins his discussion of Sicilian politics in the Seventh Letter with an account of his first journey to Italy and Syracuse (388-87 B.C.). The Seventh Letter does not say what the purpose of this first journey was. Harward says "Plato's first introduction to Sicily arose from a visit to [the Pythagorean] school" in Taras.[26] In Syracuse, Plato met and instructed Dion, who was then about twenty years old.

> What, then, do I mean by saying that my arrival in Sicily on that occasion was the foundation of everything? When I associated with Dion, who was then a youth, instructing him verbally in what I believed was best for mankind and counselling him to

> realize it in action, it seems that I was not aware that I was, in a way, unwittingly contriving the future overthrow of the tyranny. For Dion in truth, being quick-witted, both in other respects and in grasping the arguments I then put forward, hearkened to me with a keeness and ardour that I have never yet found in any of the youth whom I have met; and he determined to live the rest of his life in a different manner from the majority of the Italians and Sicilians, counting virtue worthy of more devotion than pleasure and all other kinds of luxury. In consequence, his way of life was in ill-odour with those who were conforming to the customary practices of the tyranny, until the death of Dionysius occurred.[27]

Plato left Sicily in 387 B.C. and Dionysius I died in 367 B.C. Plato does not tell us more about these twenty years than what he says in the above quotation. One of Plutarch's sources in his Life of Dion is Plato's Seventh Letter. From his other sources Plutarch relates that Dion had been in good standing with Dionysius I before Plato's visit not only because Dionysius was married to his sister but because he was wise. Plutarch says a meeting arranged by Dion between Plato and Dionysius resulted in the latter's becoming very angry at Plato because Plato said tyrants were not manly and virtuous and implied they were unjust. After Plato left Sicily, however, Dionysius trusted Dion with the management of important embassies and Dion enjoyed freedom of speech.

When Dionysius I died, Plutarch says Dion distinguished himself from the other counsellors by his judicious statesmanship. ". . . in the first conference held between the young Dionysius and his friends, Dion discoursed upon the needs of the situation in such a manner that his wisdom made all the rest appear children, and his boldness of speech made them seem mere slaves of tyranny, who were wont to give their counsels timorously and ignobly to gratify the young man."[28] Plato says Dion wrote him and asked Plato to come to

Sicily and instruct the young Dionysius. Plato was reluctant to go to Sicily because he was "afraid of how matters would turn out so far as the young people were concerned--for the desires of such as they change quickly, and frequently in a contrary direction; although, as regards Dion's own character, I knew that it was stable by nature and already sufficiently mature." Plato's decision to go was "not in the spirit which some have supposed, but dreading self-reproach most of all, lest haply I should seem to myself to be utterly and absolutely nothing more than a mere voice and never to undertake willingly any action. . . ." Now was an opportunity to realize his theories of laws and government in action; "for should I succeed in convincing one single person sufficiently, I should have brought to pass all manner of good." Plato says he could not refuse to come to Sicily without proving false to philosophy and to his friendship and association with Dion, who was now involved"in no little danger."[29]

Upon his arrival in Syracuse, Plato found that his fears as to the youth of Dionysius were justified. Dion was being slandered by the men who hated his manner and his way of life. Dionysius had had such a terrible upbringing[30] that he was influenced by these slanderers. About three months after Plato's arrival, Dion was set aboard a boat by Dionysius and sent to Italy.

After Dion was exiled, Dionysius hindered Plato's departure. Dionysius wanted Plato to admire him more than Dion, but he refused to listen to discourses on philosophy because of the influence of the slanderers. Plato "put up with all this, holding fast the original purpose with which I had come, in the hope that he might possibly gain a desire for the philosophic life; but he, with his

resistence, won the day."[31] Plato was able to terminate his second visit to Syracuse when a war broke out in Sicily. Dionysius promised to invite Dion and Plato back after the war and asked Dion not to consider himself in exile but rather living in a different place.[32] When the war ended, he sent for Plato but asked Dion to wait for a year. Dionysius was reportedly eager to study philosophy,[33] and Dion urged Plato to go. Plato refused on the grounds that he was an old man and that Dionysius did not keep his promise of inviting Dion. At the end of his second visit Plato had "effected a friendly alliance between Archytas and the Tarentines and Dionysius."[34] Letters now came to Plato from Archytas and from the men of Tarentum praising Dionysius' interest in philosophy and saying that their friendship with Dionysius could be broken if Plato did not come. Moreover, Dionysius, in a letter to Plato, threatened to jeopardize Dion's affairs if Plato refused to come. Plato's reasons for finally agreeing to undertake a third journey to Sicily (361-60 B.C.) are given at 339d-340a:

> Such then being the nature of the summons which I then received, --when on the one hand the Sicilians and the Italians were pulling me in and the Athenians, on the other, were literally pushing me out, so to say, by their entreaties,—once again the same argument recurred, namely, that it was my duty not to betray Dion, nor yet my hosts and comrades in Tarentum. And I felt also myself that there would be nothing surprising in a young man, who was apt at learning, attaining to a love of the best life through hearing lectures on subjects of importance. So it seemed to be my duty to determine clearly in which way the matter really stood, and in no wise to prove false to this duty, nor to leave myself open to a reproach that would be truly serious, if so be that any of these reports were true.
>
> So having blindfolded myself with this argumentation I made the journey, although, naturally, with many fears and none too happy forebodings.

Plato discussed philosophy with Dionysius only once and found the tyrant believed that he already had sufficient knowledge. When Dionysius appropriated Dion's property, Plato resolved to leave Sicily. Dionysius, fearing for his reputation, tried to convince Plato to remain. After some gestures of conciliation, Dionysius proceeded to sell Dion's property. Plato was forced to move outside the citadel and live among the mercenaries where his life was in danger. Plato appealed to Archytas and his other friends in Tarentum. They sent a boat to Sicily and asked Dionysius to consent to Plato's departure. Dionysius agreed and gave Plato supplies for the journey.

When Plato told Dion what had happened, Dion proposed to take vengeance on Dionysius. Plato said he would not personally go to war against Dionysius because Dionysius refrained from killing him and because he was too old. If Dionysius and Dion wished peace, Plato said he could be a conciliator because he had ties with both of them. The last pages of the Seventh Letter refer to and judge the historical events of 357-353 B.C., but Plato does not narrate these events which, at the time of the Seventh Letter's writing, were in the immediate past. For an account of these events we turn to Plutarch.

In 357 B.C. Dion gathered a force of about 800 mercenary soldiers and sailed to Sicily. He landed at Minoa, and 5000 men joined him on the march to Syracuse. Dion and his men entered Syracuse at sunrise. The Syracusans "of note and distinction, in fresh apparel, went to meet them at the gates, while the multitude set upon the tyrant's friends and seized those called tale-bearers, wicked men whom the gods hated, who went up and down in the city

busily mingling with the Syracusans and reporting to the tyrant the sentiments and utterances of every one."[35] Dion and his brother Megacles were made generals with absolute powers; at their entreaty twenty colleagues were chosen to hold office with them. Dionysius sent barbarian mercenaries to attack the Syracusans, but they were driven back into the citadel by Dion's forces.

During Plato's third journey to Syracuse, a man named Heracleides had narrowly escaped from Dionysius and his peltasts (light-armed soldiers).[36] After quarrelling with Dion in exile, Heracleides decided to sail by himself and with his own fleet against Dionysius. Heracleides arrived in Syracuse after Dion and began stirring up the multitude against Dion. Dion's gravity of manners was repellent to the people. Plutarch says they resented it "as severe and out of place in a public man, because their power had given them license and boldness, and they wished to be flattered by popular leaders before they were really a people."[37] Heracleides

> induced Hippo, one of their leaders, to make proposals to the people for a distribution of land, urging that liberty was based on equality, and slavery on the poverty of those who had naught. Supporting Hippo, and heading a faction which overwhelmed the opposition of Dion, Heracleides persuaded the Syracusans to vote this measure, to deprive the mercenaries of their pay, and to elect other generals, thus ridding themselves of the severities of Dion. So the people, attempting, as it were, to stand at once upon their feet after their long sickness of tyranny, and to act the part of independence out of season, stumbled in their undertakings, and yet hated Dion, who, like a physician, wished to subject the city to a strict and temperate regimen.[38]

The antipathy of the people forced Dion and his men to go to Leontini, where they were received with honors. The Syracusans, after a naval battle with Dionysius' triremes,"were made wanton by their victory, and in their utter lack of discipline turned their rejoicing

into drinking-bouts and mad carousals . . . ."[39] Dionysius' barbarians were now let loose to sack the city. In the horror that ensued, the Syracusans sent for Dion, and Dion and his men began the journey to Syracuse. When the barbarians went back into the citadel, some of the Syracusans decided they no longer needed Dion's services and they sent messages to this effect to him. The barbarians, however, were again set loose from the acropolis, and now they slaughtered men, women, and children and set fire to the city. In these circumstances the Syracusans welcomed Dion as their savior and god. Dion and his men defeated Dionysius' forces and extinguished the conflagration.

Of the popular leaders, Heracleides and Theodotes surrendered to Dion; the rest fled. Dion's friends urged him to allow the soldiers to kill Heracleides and Theodotes, but Dion set them free. Dionysius' son was now in control of the citadel. Due to lack of provisions and a revolt by his mercenaries, he was forced to surrender the besieged citadel to Dion; in exchange for the citadel, Dion permitted him a safe departure.

Dion's rule and his personal way of life were moderate. According to Plutarch, he planned to establish a mixture of democracy and royalty administered by an aristocracy.[40] Now Heracleides had once more made a nuisance of himself, and Dion finally yielded to those who had long asked for his death. But machinations against Dion and his policies did not end with the removal of Heracleides. Callippus, the Athenian who had entered Syracuse at Dion's side and was honored and trusted by him, bribed some of Dion's mercenaries and proceeded to plot against him. Plato says Dion's friendship with

Callippus had been based not on philosophy but "from the ordinary companionship out of which most friendships spring, and which comes from mutual entertaining and sharing in mystic ceremonies."[41] Both Plato and Plutarch attribute the events of this time to evil supernatural powers.[42] In 353 B.C., while Dion was in a state of depression caused by the murder of Heracleides and the appearance of a spectre, Callippus put into action his plot and Dion was murdered.

Although Plato was not strongly in favor of Dion's expedition, he defends Dion and his actions and policies. Plato attacks the plots and conspiracies of the demagogues and the proposals for distributing the wealth of the few to the many as destructive to the regime. A man who would seek power by these means "would bring upon himself and his race an everlasting curse." Plato supports Dion's plans for a moderate government "and the establishment of the justest and best of laws by means of the fewest possible exiles and executions."[43]

> Yet when Dion was now pursuing this course, resolved to suffer rather than to do unholy deeds--although guarding himself against so suffering--none the less when he had attained the highest pitch of superiority over his foes he stumbled. And therein he suffered no surprising fate. For while, in dealing with the unrighteous, a righteous man who is sober and sound of mind will never be wholly deceived concerning the souls of such men; yet it would not, perhaps, be surprising if he were to share the fate of a good pilot, who, though he certainly would not fail to notice the oncoming of a storm, yet might fail to realize its extraordinary and unexpected violence, and in consequence of that failure might be forcibly overwhelmed. And Dion's downfall was, in fact, due to the same cause; for while he most certainly did not fail to notice that those who brought him down were evil men, yet did he fail to realize to what a pitch of folly they had come, and of depravity also and voracious greed; and thereby he was brought down and lies fallen, enveloping Sicily in immeasurable woe.[44]

After a thirteen-month rule, Callippus was deposed by Dion's nephew, Hipparinus II (a son of Dionysius I and Dion's sister Aristomachē) who, after a drunken brawl in which he died, was succeeded by his brother Nysaios in about ~~360~~ 350 B.C.

> Both men were worthless characters, to whom tyranny was merely a means of enjoying a life of unchecked self-indulgence. Nysaios was turned out by Dionysios, who re-established himself as tyrant in 346 B.C., and had a second reign of two years. None of these rulers gave settled government to the city, which sank into a deplorable condition; many of its citizens fled, and some of the streets were overgrown with grass. Tyrants were also ruling in those other Sicilian cities which Plato and Dion had been anxious to re-establish. Finally an appeal was made to Corinth, and the tyrannies of Syracuse and the other cities of the Sicilians were overthrown by Timoleon. Democratic governments were established, and for a short time the land enjoyed rest.... But there was no permanence in the settlement which he effected; and twenty years after his death the city was groaning under the tyranny of Agathokles.[45]

During the reign of Callippus, associates and friends of Dion wrote to Plato claiming that their policy was the same as Dion's and asking Plato to support it by word and deed. Plato's reply is the Seventh Letter.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The Peace Times, March 7, 1970, p.4.

[2] "Regime is the order, the form, which gives society its character. Regime is therefore a specific manner of life. Regime is the form of life as living together, the manner of living of society and in society, since this manner depends decisively on the predominance of human beings of a certain type, on the manifest domination of society by human beings of a certain type. Regime means that whole, which we today are in the habit of viewing primarily in a fragmentized form: regime means simultaneously the form of life of a society, its style of life, its moral taste, form of society, form of state, form of government, spirit of laws. We may try to articulate the simple and unitary thought, that expresses itself in the term politeia /the Greek word of which "regime" is the English translation/, as follows: life is activity which is directed towards some goal; social life is an activity which is directed towards such a goal as can be pursued only by society; but in order to pursue a specific goal, as its comprehensive goal, society must be organized, ordered, constructed, constituted in a manner which is in accordance with that goal; this, however, means that the authoritative human beings must be akin to that goal.

"There is a variety of regimes. Each regime raises a claim, explicitly or implicitly, which extends beyond the boundaries of any given society. These claims conflict, therefore, with each other. There is a variety of conflicting regimes. Thus the regimes themselves, and not any preoccupation of mere bystanders, force us to wonder which of the given conflicting regimes is better, and ultimately, which regime is the best regime. Classical political philosophy is guided by the question of the best regime." Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" What is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), p.34. Cf. pp. 34-36; Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 135-145, 190-194; "Plato," History of Political Philosophy (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), pp. 35-38; "An Epilogue," in Herbert Storing (ed.), Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), pp. 318-19; Joseph Cropsey, "Radicalism and Its Roots," Public Policy, XVIII, No.3 (Spring, 1970), p. 302.

[3] For the character of the American regime, cf. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America; Abraham Lincoln, "Address to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield"; Paul Eidelberg, The Philosophy of the American Constitution: A Reinterpretation of the Intentions of the Founding Fathers (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Eidelberg, "Intellectual and Moral Anarchy in American Society," The Review of Politics 32, No.1 (January, 1970), pp.32-50; George Anastaplo, The Constitutionalist: Notes on the First Amendment (Dallas: Southern University Press, 1970); "On Civil Disobedience: Thoreau and Socrates," Southwest Review (Spring, 1969); Joseph Cropsey, "Conservatism and Liberalism," in Robert Goldwin (ed.), Left, Right and Center (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967); Cropsey, "The Right of Foreign Aid," in Goldwin (ed. Why Foreign Aid? (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963); Cropsey, "The Moral Basis of International Action," in Goldwin (ed.), America Armed (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963).

[4]Cf. Strauss, "Perspectives on the Good Society," Liberalism Ancient and Modern (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp.261-62; Cropsey, "Radicalism and Its Roots"; Cropsey, "United States Policy and the Meaning of Modernity" in Jack Gabbert (ed.), American Foreign Policy and Revolutionary Change (Washington State University Press, 1968).

[5]Herbert Marcuse, "The Concept of Essence," Negations: Essays in Critical Theory (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). Originally published in German in Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, Vol. V (1936). See especially pp. 43-46, 64-78, 84-87 of the Beacon Press edition.

[6]Leo Strauss, The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 153; "What is Political Philosophy," pp. 27-29; Scott Buchanan, "Natural Law and Teleology" in Natural Law and Modern Society (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 87-92; David Grene, Greek Political Theory: The Image of Man in Thucydides and Plato (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), p.189.

[7]Compare "The Concept of Essence" with Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). Cf. Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?"; Paul Eidelberg, "The Temptation of Herbert Marcuse," Review of Politics,(October, 1969); Roger D. Masters, "What in Marx Speaks to Today's Young Iconoclasts?" Saturday Review (April 5, 1969), pp. 31-33, 56.

[8]"The Concept of Essence," p.72.

[9]Ibid., p. 73.

[10]An Essay on Liberation, pp. 25-26.

[11]Cf. Leo Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," Social Research, 13, No. 3 (1946), pp. 326-367.

[12]An account of the history of Syracuse and Plato's three journeys to Syracuse is provided in the Appendix (pp. 29-39, supra). The questions, interpretations, and arguments of this essay presuppose a reading of this account. The account is a summary and not an analysis of the sources on which it is based.

[13]I have decided that the letter consists of six sections divided as follows:

(1) Introductory paragraph. After Dion's rule of Syracuse ended with his assassination, Plato received a letter from the "friends and associates of Dion" asking him to support their political policy, which they claimed was the same as Dion's. This letter has not survived, and we do not know how it was signed; from the context of the Seventh Letter it appears that the writers of the letter called themselves "the associates and friends of Dion" and perhaps signed their individual names. However this may be, Plato does not know them well enough to be sure that their policy is the same as Dion's. He promises to support their policy "if you really hold the same views

and aims as he . . . but if not, I will ponder the matter many times over. And what was his policy and aim I will tell you, and that, as I may say, not from mere conjecture but from certain knowledge." Plato and Dion discussed the policy during Plato's first journey to Sicily, and Dion did not change his views. The first paragraph indicates that the addressees of the Seventh Letter may not have a sufficient grasp of Dion's policy and that a few of the addressees are too young to remember the important historical events in Sicily. Plato mentions the name Hipparinus; we do not know for certain whether this Hipparinus is Dion's son (Hipparinus III) or the son of Dion's sister and Dionysius I (Hipparinus II). Plato says "it is no matter of surprise if some Deity has made Hipparinus also come to share /Dion's/ views about government and be of the same mind." Plato will tell his old and young addressees how these views originated.

(2) Paragraphs 2-4 (324b-326b). A discussion of Plato's political experiences at Athens and his political and philosophical reflections prior to his first journey to Sicily.

(3) Paragraphs 5-6 (326b-327b). Plato's first journey to Sicily (388-87 B.C.) during the reign of Dionysius I. His observation of Sicilian life gives rise to reflections on politics and philosophy which confirm his previous conclusions. Plato instructs Dion, then a youth, who "hearkened to me with a keeness and ardour that I have never yet found in any of the youth whom I have met." Plato's instruction was about "what I believed was best for mankind" and therefore in conflict with the prevailing regime.

(4) Paragraphs 7-12 (327b-330c). After the death of Dionysius I (367 B.C.), Dion asks Plato to counsel the new leader, Dionysius II, in order to prevent him from following the same tyrannical path as his father. Plato's second visit to Syracuse was not successful, however, because Dionysius II refused instruction and banished Dion.

(5) Paragraphs 12-22 (330c-337e). Plato's counsel to the associates and friends of Dion. He compares this counsel to his counsels to Dion and Dionysius and discusses its philosophic implications.

(6) Paragraphs 22-49 (337e-352a). A narrative of Plato's third journey to Sicily (361-60 B.C.). A discussion of the relations between Dionysius II and Plato leads to the question of the relation between philosophy and politics and to an account of the philosophic quest.

[14]". . . the result of his father's conduct was to leave him unprovided with education and unprovided with suitable intercourse. . . . Seventh Letter 332 c-d. Cf. Plutarch, Life of Dion IX. 2-3.

[15]"And when I came /to Sicily the first time/ I was in no wise pleased at all with 'the blissful life,' as it is there termed, replete as it is with Italian and Syracusan banquetings; for thus one's existence is spent in gorging food twice a day and never sleeping alone at night, and all the practices which accompany this mode of living. For not a single man of all who live beneath the heavens could ever become wise if these were his practices from his youth, since none will be found to possess a nature so admirably compounded; nor would he ever be likely to become temperate; and the same may be said

of all other forms of virtue. And no State (polis) would remain stable under laws of any kind, if its citizens, while supposing that they ought to spend everywhere to excess, yet believed that they ought to cease from all exertion except feastings and drinkings and the vigorous pursuit of their amours. Of necessity these States never cease changing into tyrannies, oligarchies, and democracies, and the men who hold power in them cannot endure so much as the mention of the name of a just government with equal laws." Seventh Letter 326c-d.

[16]One of the purposes of this essay is to prove that the Seventh Letter and the Republic were written by the same author. The teachings of Socrates in the Republic and of Plato in the Seventh Letter are essentially the same. The [redacted] differences will be interpreted as secondary phenomena deriving from the same principle. If the Seventh Letter was really not written by Plato, it was written by someone who possessed a profound knowledge of Plato's philosophy. If this is the case, the Seventh Letter still deserves study because the elaboration of Platonic principles in the letter helps us to understand politics, philosophy, and, indirectly, our own time.

[17]Thus Plato justifies his aloofness from Athenian politics in the Fifth Letter:

> "Suppose, however, that . . . someone were to say: 'Plato, as it seems, is claiming to know what is of advantage to democracy; yet when he has had it in his power to speak before the demos and to counsel it for the best he has never yet stood up and made a speech"—to this you may reply that "Plato was born late in the history of his country, and he found the demos already old and habituated by the previous statesmen to do many things at variance with his own counsel. For he would have given counsel to it, as to his father, with the greatest possible pleasure, had he not supposed that he would be running risks in vain, and would do no good. And I suppose that he would do the same as regards counselling me. For if he deemed us to be in an incurable state, he would bid us a long farewell and leave off giving counsel about me or my affairs!" Cf. Republic 496a-497c.

[18]Although the tone does not sound like Plato, consider this passage from a letter to Dionysius (Second Letter 314c-d):

> "You were surprised at my sending Polyxenus to you; but now as of old I repeat the same statement about Lycophron also and the others you have with you, that, as respects dialectic, you are far superior to them all both in natural intelligence and in argumentative ability; and I maintain that if any of them is beaten in argument, this defeat is not voluntary, as some imagine, but involuntary. All the same, it appears that you treat them with the greatest consideration and make them presents. So much, then, about these men: too much, indeed, about such as they!"

[19]Gilbert Ryle, Plato's Progress (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), pp. 68-82.

[20]Cf. pp. 5-8 and n. 13, supra.

[21]Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," pp. 349-355; Grene, Greek Political Theory, pp. 110-124; Herman Sinaiko, "Dialogue and Dialectic: Plato's Philosophy and the Written Word," Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato: Dialogue and Dialectic in Phaedrus, Republic, Parmenides (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965). Cf. Phaedrus 257b-279c.

[22]A vulgar and dim reflection of Plato's thought can be seen today in the Soviet Union and China, where the state has separated the children from pre-Communist influences and brainwashed them in the dogmas of the regime. Among other things, this practice has resulted in the ridiculous spectacle of Chinese diplomats (holding the Thoughts of Chairman Mao in one hand and making the pointed gesture of parental superiority with the other) admonishing the country where they are guests with childish pedantry and empty moralism. In recent decades the attempt has been made to associate Plato's philosophy with both fascism and Marxian Communism. Such an attempt does not realize the essential differences between Plato's philosophy and these modern ideologies. Cf. n. 24.

[23]Published by the British House of Commons, February 14, 1648. In William Haller and Godfrey Davies (eds.), The Leveller Tracts (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1944), p. 120.

[24]The ambiguity of the word "teaching" may cause some problems here. Strauss says ("On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," pp. 350-51):

"One does not need the evidence of the Seventh Letter in order to see that Plato 'prohibited' written expositions of his teaching. Since Plato refrained from presenting his most important teaching 'with all clarity,' the prohibition against written expositions of his teaching is self-enforcing: everyone who presents such an exposition becomes, to use a favorite Platonic expression, 'ridiculous,' inasmuch as he can easily be refuted and confounded by passages in the dialogues which contradict his exposition.[30] No interpretation of Plato's teaching can be proved fully by historical evidence. For the crucial part of his interpretation the interpreter has to fall back on his own resources: Plato does not relieve him of the responsibility for discovering the decisive part of the argument by himself. The undying controversy about the meaning of the idea of the good is a sufficiently clear sign of this. Who can say that he understands what Plato means by the idea of good if he has not discovered by himself, though guided by Plato's hints the exact or scientific argument which establishes the necessity and the precise character of that 'idea,' that is, the argument which alone would have satisfied Plato and which he refused to present to us in the Republic or anywhere else?

"Plato composed his writings in such a way as to prevent for all time their use as authoritative texts. His dialogues supply us not so much with an answer to the riddle of being as with a most articulate 'imitation' of that riddle. His teaching can never become the subject of indoctrination. In the last analysis his writings cannot be used for any purpose other than for philosophizing. In particular, no social order and no party which ever existed or which ever will exist can rightfully claim Plato as its patron."

We discussed above Plato's statement in the Seventh Letter that he did not write a treatise on the serious subjects and that the things themselves are beyond verbal expression. Plato's 'teaching' in the full sense would include his own knowledge of the highest truths, a knowledge which is not simply presented in his writings. This knowledge is the object of philosophic study; in the Republic the guardians do not begin to study the highest subject, the idea of good, until they are fifty years old. In this essay the word "teaching" is used in a more restricted sense. We have interpreted Plato's teaching in the Seventh Letter and Republic to be an account of man's nature and the best regime. Philosophy is essential to this account; one of the questions which arises from this account is the relation of political and moral philosophy to metaphysical and natural philosophy. The philosopher-king of the Republic has knowledge of the idea of good. Is knowledge of metaphysics and nature indispensable for good rule? What is the relation between human nature and non-human nature? (Cf. Seventh Letter 344b; Joseph Cropsey, "Political Life and a Natural Order," Journal of Politics (February, 1961), pp. 46-56.) What is the difference between the ancient and modern understanding of this relation? Compare Plato's Seventh Letter and Republic with Machiavelli's Prince and Descartes' Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences. Descartes and Machiavelli see nature or Fortuna as an object not of man's contemplation but of man's conquest. For accounts of ancient and modern natural right teachings, cf. Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); Center for Study of Democratic Institutions, Natural Law and Modern Society (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1961).

[25]Harward, pp. 9-10.

[26]Ibid., p. 3.

[27]Seventh Letter 336e-327b.

[28]Plutarch, Life of Dion VI. 3-4.

[29]Seventh Letter 328b-c.

[30]Cf. Seventh Letter 332c-d, Life of Dion IX. 1-3.

[31]330b.

[32]According to Plutarch (XVII), Dion studied at the Academy during his absence from Sicily.

[33]Seventh Letter 338c-339a gives Plato's interpretation of these reports.

[34]338c-d.

[35]Life of Dion XXVIII. 1-2.

[36]Seventh Letter 348a-c.

[37]XXXI. 3.

[38]XXXVII. 3-4.

[39]XLI. 1.

[40]LIII.

[41]Seventh Letter 333e.

[42]Seventh Letter 326d-e; Life of Dion II. 3-4, LV.

[43]Seventh Letter 351a-c.

[44]351d-e.

[45]Harward, pp. 51-52.

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